

Collectors: Jim Leary, Sue Ellen Smith, Greta Swenson

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Informant: Art Moilenen  
 Art's Bar  
 Mass City, Michigan

ETHNIC HERITAGE  
 SOUND ARCHIVE & RESOURCE CENTER  
 NORTHLAND COLLEGE, ASHLAND, WI

Our trio, enroute to the "Copper Country," arrived at Mass City, Michigan around 2 o'clock. The town was a small spot in the road between Bruce Crossing and Houghton-Hancock. It had a few gas stations, a motel, two taverns, a store, a restaurant, a scattering of houses, and little else. I knew from Matt Gallman, however, that one of the taverns ("Art's Bar") was owned by Art Moilenen - a noted Finnish-American piano accordion player. And so, we pulled in for a drink. The tavern was a large open room with tables, a small space for dancing, and an L-shaped bar (see diagram). There were a dozen or so hunters in their wool and flame orange arranged along the bar.

Since our stay would be brief and since I intended to visit Art another time, I decided, with Greta and Sue Ellen, to just have a drink and check out the place without introducing ourselves. Accordingly, we ordered drinks and occupied the last three bar stools. There was plenty of evidence that a Finn and a musician owned the place. Behind the bar were a sign in "Finnglish" announcing that the bar closed at two, a small receptacle held Finnish coins, while a hangar displayed a blue T-shirt adorned with the drawing of a piano accordion and the words "Art's Bar" and "Where in the Hall is Mass City, Michigan." Beside the T-shirt a large color portrait of the owner beamed at us. To the left of the bar, tacked on a bulletin board, were a half dozen pictures of Art playing accordion - sometimes alone, sometimes with several other accordionists. Behind the dance area was a table holding an old and a new piano accordion and a 1939 addition of Eric Olzen's Old Time Scandinavian Melodies (I'm not certain of this title, but the right information can be found in the bibliography of Leroy Larson's dissertation). Above the instruments and song book a small sign announced that Art and a guitar player would play for a dance on Saturday, November 22nd. The jukebox also held half a dozen Finnish numbers, including the omnipresent "Maaailman Matti."

Our beer had been served by "Irene" and, from her conversations with other patrons, we gathered it was Art's day off. Half way through our drinks, however, he arrived in hunter costume, complaining that he had been too late in his attempt to get a hunting license. He poured himself a brandy and roamed along the bar

complaining to everyone, in a jowlar way, that he would again be confined behind the bar on his day off. From his manner and the response of his patrons, it was obvious that Art had a pleasant joking relationship with all. He is a trim man in his mid-sixties, of medium height with a red face and twinkling eyes. I began to wish we had more time to spend. But we still had another hour or so of driving and numerous deeds ahead so we slid off our chairs to amble out - pausing slightly in front of the instruments.

Art observed our curiosity and asked if we played. That question, of course, did the trick - we introduced ourselves, mentioned our friendship with Matt Gallman, and began an animated conversation. I will save my comments on Art's life history since I intend to record that information fully at a later date, but it's worth setting down what happened next. Art told us plenty about his life, told us about his playing, offered an "Aino and Urvo" Finnish joke, played us a fast Finnish polka, bought us two rounds of drinks (including a blackberry brandy for himself), and performed a risqué song, of his own composition, about a wood tick's journey through a woman's clothing. Of considerable interest was the fact that Art knew and was visited by Wisconsin Finnish-Americans like Walter "Arnie" Johnson and the "Oulu Hot Shots." Beyond this Art informed us that a part of a film about Finnish-American culture would be shot at a dance at his place in early December (see attached clipping). He also showed us several books of humorous "Finnglish" dialect poetry by Heino A. "Hep" Puotinen.

We left, feeling a little buzzed, at about 3:30. I promised to call Art after Thanksgiving to arrange for a recording visit.